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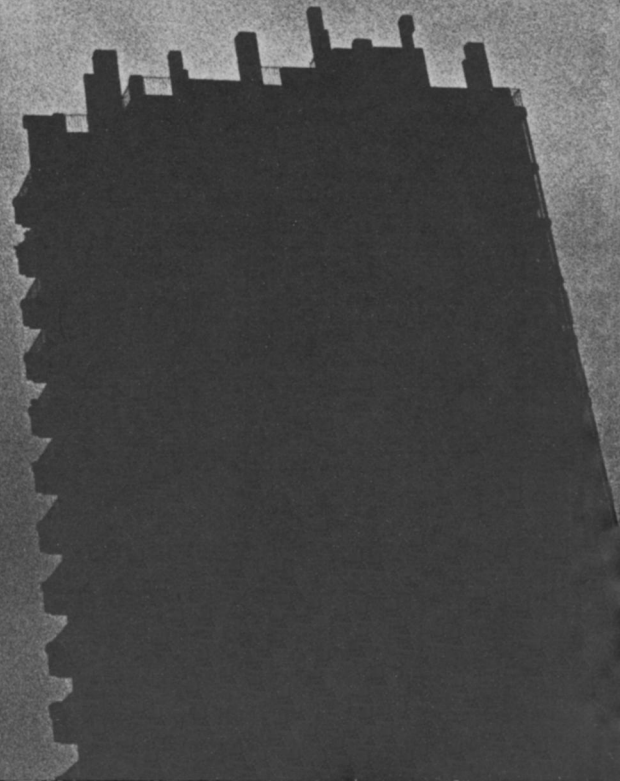
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New Directions in Art Education



June King McFee

What is the future of art education?
Are we being modified and changed by pressures from the outside?
Are there trends in today's amorphous society that may influence our future directions?

In order to project ways in which we may be changing, we should attempt to identify where we are now and what may be our take-off point for change. This is very difficult to do except in a most impressionistic way. No one has drawn any kind of national sample of the trends in art in elementary and secondary schools or extensively in teacher education. We have some indicators of trends from our literature, from topics discussed at national conventions, from school exhibits, and from observation of classes; but anything beyond spotty impressions is not available at this time. If the national assessment report on music is any indicator (and much more music is taught than art), we can't assume that we are having much impact.

We know that strong efforts are being made to develop programmed sequential or individualized instruction in art. We know of efforts to improve and extend the art curriculum, but we have a strong suspicion that the amount of time given to art in elementary schools is decreasing as accountability in other subjects moves faster than in ours and thus takes up even more of the teacher's time.

Conversely, we also know that in many places the demand for elective courses in art in high school and colleges has never been higher. This appears to be influenced by a national concern for self-fulfillment and introversion as a reaction to the social activism of the late 60's and early 70's. Part of the increased interest in creative work in art may well be a desire to express introspection as a means of self-fulfillment. This value seems to be at variance with the value placed on the structural content of art to improve the quality of learning by a society that wants to be sure its money for education is well spent.

It is my impression that the last 20 years of art education theory building and research have not had much impact on practice generally. Current trends in the structure of our national organization have increased separations between university theoreticians and researchers, and public school people. There is much less contact now than five years ago. Our strongest points in the country are in places where universities and public schools work closely together in pre and in-service education so that the feedback link between theory and practice become viable and mutually helpful. But in relation to the mass of

public school education, such centers as we do have where this is taking place are much too few. We do not really know how much impact they have on education generally.

From this amorphous and somewhat negative description of where we may be, let's try to imagine what may be ahead.

It seems reasonably clear that this country is surviving one of its most difficult internal struggles, and due process of law is carrying us through. But during this struggle it is difficult to predict what will happen to the values most upheld by our society. When the values of either of the extremes of conservatism or liberalism in a society are shaken, the middle-road values tend to carry the society through; but when the so-called middle is shaken up pretty thoroughly, it is hard to predict which way the society as a whole will shift. The forces that support accountability could be old hat in five years because those forces are no longer dominant and a new synthesis of values, which could dominate our country, would value something else. Conversely, the trend toward structure could continue even more strongly than at present. The current introversive trend evidenced by young people and their search in the arts for meaning in their lives could easily become activist, outer-directed. When there is more hope for the future, nostalgia may decrease and more extroversive concern for one's fellow man again increase.

This leads to what I foresee as an important future demand on the artist and art education. Art as a social function needs much more development than ever before. Without depreciating the need for art as a very personal, individualized, and introspective part of human expression, we need to turn the coin over and also develop the capacity to use art as a humanizing force in improving the quality of life on this earth. This cannot be done on an individualized basis alone, but must be done through concern for others.

There are trends we can identify that are quite clearly predictable. They are the results of overpopulation, decreased natural resources, and inflation on a world-wide basis.

1. We are all going to have to live our lives in less space and share our space and our resources with more people.

2. We are going to have to design our space with less use of the world's resources.

3. We are going to have to be able to design for the common good and still maintain the uniqueness of individuals and groups.

4. We are going to have to shift from seeking completed goods to designing well. We are going to have to design for processes of changing environments

and life styles, as we adjust to changes in our resources.

5. We may no longer be able to indulge in the luxury of art for its own sake; we must be equally concerned with art for humanity's sake. This requires a broad and flexible extension of our concepts of what art is. We need to be able to relate qualitative decisions to economic and social decisions.

6. We must find ways to stimulate creativity and design flexibility without wasting increasingly scarce and expensive materials. We can no longer afford the luxury of that old assumption that if children play with a wide assortment of materials long enough, they can't help coming up with a novel idea. Even some of our best programmed instruction in art will have to be revised, or we will be priced right out of the classroom. Ways must be found to experiment and explore with symbols and organizations without wasting resources: using materials so they can be used again; redesigning from previously used things; designing things for multiple uses; designing for multiple options.

To bring this discussion to a more practical level, I am going to focus on environmental design, ways these forces for change will affect what we do in art education.

First, let's consider some key problems of urban areas that are particularly critical. Robert B. Pitts, formerly a director of the Pacific Regional Office of Housing and Urban Development, and a scholar on the subject of organization problems, cites our mistakes in transferring the values of an *agrarian* society, which grew out of the necessity for people to be very *independent* to survive in rural areas, to the city where everyone is intricately interdependent on everyone else.¹ He cites that our systems of taxation, government, and education in the cities are borrowed from the agrarian situation and do not fit the complex interdependence of the city. In education, particularly art education, do we prepare students to deal with the problems of interdependence? Do we encourage them to create art with a concern for its impact on others? Do we encourage designing with other people's needs in mind? Do we help them develop the capacity to make a *unique environment* for themselves that does not destroy the unique environment of their neighbors? We are faced with the difficulty of preserving independence so necessary for democratic processes to survive, in an urban situation where *interdependence* is a basic ingredient of urban survival.

Three distinct values about social systems are found in the city: *individual autonomy*, *interdependence*, and *communality*. They are not the same and do not produce the same results.

(1) Those who adhere to the social value of *environmental autonomy* have assumed that the city would take care of itself by the work of individuals. This has not worked very well. It has led, in many cases, to environmental anarchy; as resources decrease and prices increase, this value system will be even more difficult to maintain. (2) Those who recognize the necessity for interdependence in a city, place value on the social value of interdependent problem solving. This requires a high level of understanding on every urban citizen's part, of resources, options, and relationships between decisions, and puts heavy responsibilities on education. It requires that every citizen be as responsible for decisions and maintenance of the public domain as for the private. We can't move on to new places much longer. We must rebuild, restore, and maintain, as never before.

Students must be more aware of the relationship of aesthetic decisions to economic and political decisions and the ways these affect the long range ongoing organismic changes within urban areas.

The effects of one set of private decisions affect the quality of life of many other people. (3) Environmental communality leaves all decisions to the state or urban developer and tends to result in over-ordered situations to which the individual must adjust, the degree of freedom of choice in the environment is diminished radically. Those who value physical order at the expense of social and visual diversity may be motivated by *economic expediency* or social communality. Arguments could be made that in this critical resource situation only overall control will work. Hopefully there is still a chance that an educated concerned public can save itself.

If we ignore environmental design in education, we are perpetuating anarchy - or easy submission to communality. To educate for individuality within an interdependent urban society, we must study this environment to search for methods of helping students understand it and help find ways to maintain their individuality while taking responsibility for the whole city. The realization that the energy crisis is real and that we will have to make drastic changes has produced one of the major value conflicts in the nation today. The long held value that people, property, space, clean air, water, and natural landscapes, are all expendable as long as they expedite the acquisition of more opportunity to increase the gross national product and that this kind of growth is essential to survival and must at all costs go on is being questioned as never before. Suddenly we realize we have created a kind of urban form we can no longer support in the same degree as before.

Nowhere are the dominant society's

values more in evidence than in the values expressed in strip areas of cities. Strip areas of cities represent a social change we do not fully understand even as they may be on their way out as transportation patterns change. On observation, it appears that the strip developed as a result of the transaction of new social patterns and inventions which created the physical condition. The invention was bigger automobiles, station wagons, and vans which used inexpensive gasoline. The social pattern was the use of these machines as moving habitat. Families used the car for feeding and sleeping children while driving up and down the strip to shop or going to the strip area's drive-in theatre. Teenagers used the car as a transitional home between leaving parents and establishing their own. The drive-in parking lots along the strip became meeting grounds for social interaction, exchanging passengers to see and be seen.

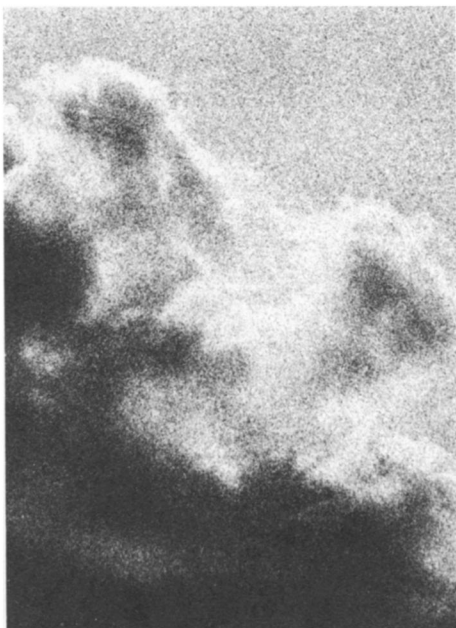
The need for catching the attention of this mobile population conditioned store owners to counteract what the other fellow did by making their signs bigger and brighter, more independent of their neighbors, as they competed for the attention of people in fast moving automobiles. Facilities were built there for these interactions because the land was cheaper at the edge of cities and towns than in the center. Buildings did not have to accommodate people who spent much time in them, so they could be inexpensively built - facade structures without much internal design. The combination of these activities: the unbridled competition for the attention of people in cars, and the minimal structural needs of strip area buildings, has produced an environmental by-product—the physical form of the strip area. Surface beautification alone won't solve the problem of what to do with these areas. Communities, urban, large and small, need to understand the social-physical-aesthetic value system interactions, as they change through time in order to wisely make recommendations about the quality of this or any other urban environment. A central question now is: How can strip areas and urban shopping centers based on the automobile be redesigned or recycled as travel by car decreases? How can design judgments be brought into play with economic and social forces?

The long standing value that a man's property, his business, or his home, was his to do with as he wished never alluded to the reality that property lines are not visual lines. The demarcation between the public and the private can be drawn on property lines. But what can be seen of the private sector, be it home or business, is visually far beyond its boundaries, that its smoke and refuse pollute even a larger area, that in total it can change the character

and space, thus the quality of experience, of far more people than they realize. This example is only one of hundreds where the character, quality, and useability of an area are changed by decisions made by using only one set of values, most often the greatest economic return for the least expenditure.

That this does not have to be the case is well documented. Factories can be designed to enhance and upgrade the quality of experience of the people who live or work near them. They can be cited so that they are less disruptive of other network systems. But education in values and in the effects of form, light, color, and space, as they relate to the use of the environment, needs to be part of the education of everyone who is going to live in a highly interdependent society, an urban society. Certainly decision makers in politics, planning, and industry will need such an education.

Another value of American society is that economic growth is necessary for survival, with little or no concern for what is outgrown. Multi-unit housing, with a life expectancy of 20 years, is springing up all over. There are no economic, legal, or social allowances for removing them and restoring the land after this period of time. We have, as a society, left our out-moded garbage littered over the land, not only automobiles, but our cheaply built, outgrown, out-moded housing. Further, we are left with generations of housing and building, each built for generations of use, that we allow to deteriorate, because of another value: *that if it is newer, it is better*. Much of our central cities have strong, handsome old buildings, whose spaces need renewed study to see how they might be used, how they might contribute a humane and pleasant place to live or work. But our values on growth and on newness hinder many people from seeing their worth. In art our emphasis on the original individual design has neglected the value of redesigning, reorganizing, and restoring. Finally, in an agrarian society there were always greener areas to move on to. Central cities could be left for suburbs; forests could be destroyed; strip mines could scar the landscape; sides of streams could be polluted because there were more streams that were still fresh, more forests to cut. But now, sadly, we know this value system no longer works. While our resistance to changing our life style is increasing, the demand to increase exploitation of resources continues. While lip service is given to restoring the land, this in itself takes monumental amounts of fuel and water. Suburbs of one city run into another; in many parts of the country central cities are left uncared for and continue to decay. Our last wilderness areas have had to be walled



in to preserve them from ourselves. Strip city America, with its signs and symbols, may soon become a national highway of relics.

Developing Curriculum for Understanding the Environment

Now let us look at the urban scene to see what concepts and percepts of the city we could use to help students understand the city from a *use of space*, *quality of space* point of view.

1: Studying Value Conflicts.

Students and teachers need to study the effect of each of these value conflicts on the *quality* of the environment and ways this conditions the quality of their experience. The artist teacher role must change to meet the demand for art education that prepares students to deal effectively with the inseparable *use-look* relationships in the city so they can take responsibility for their contributions to the shared environment of the highly interdependent urban scene.

2: Studying Space

We can help students understand space—a space is an area bounded by things that separate it from other spaces. The character of a space depends on how it is used and the things that made it a space. It is different from each individual depending on how he has learned to see it. But some things are common about spaces for all of us.

A space is different when it is used differently: for example, people strolling or people hurrying, people going in one direction, two directions, or many. A space is different when the *light changes*: night, morning, noon, or afternoon, for example. The contrasts are stronger or weaker; objects are clear or blurred; and night lights focus on selected areas. A space is different as weather changes or the wind changes speed or direction. A space is different when it is *surrounded by natural things or man-made things*. A

space is different depending on the *quality and condition* of man-made things and natural things. A space is different when it is made monotonous or chaotic, completely ordered or ordered with variety, by the way people use it or the ways men create things around it, or both. A chaotic space such as an uncoordinated city street appears more ordered by repeated Christmas decorations or a long parade of marching people.

The experience we have in a space is different when its use is related or unrelated to its size, its color, its light, its shape, its heat, etc. For example, a small windowless room, with low ceiling, drab walls, poor lighting, over heated and inadequate ventilation, full of people who do not know each other, can be changed by modifying any one of these variables. If the people know that this is an elevator and they soon will get out, expectation of change modifies their experience. If they know they all have to wait a long time, the environment has more effect on them. But we could change their experience in waiting by providing adequate air and normal temperature. We could change their experience by raising the ceiling or brightening the color, increasing the light, opening up a wall or the outlook from the room, or any combination of these.

Sometimes the quality of a space doesn't allow people many choices in what they can do, and if the space is too limited, people cannot move, and panic results. Some spaces allow people many choices of things that are possible to do. Some spaces symbolically tell us what is appropriate to do there. These are just some of the communicatives we get from our environment through the size, shape, and color of a space even before visual symbols were added that might let us know this was a public waiting room, someone's home, a church, the entrance to a theatre.

This may sound academic, but the study can be action research on the part of students—children or adolescents. (1) Studying how a space is used—from a chair to a busy sidewalk. (2) Studying how changing the shape, size, light, or color, of a space affects how a space is used. (3) Studying how changing the use of a space makes it function better for some purpose—for example, the classroom itself. (4) Studying how the use and the look of a space affect each other; and changing one or the other to see how it works. (5) Studying how the sizes and the symbols in a space can make the space workable. Does the shape, size, and color of the symbols help them serve their function better? (6) What do the symbols in a space tell us about what people value? What do litter and disrepair say to us? What do fences do? What do they say? How

does the entrance to space tell us what goes on inside, and how one should behave? As you watch children's responses to these tasks, you are going to get more information about how they see the city and what they value.

Children can learn to be more aware of the spaces they use at school. What is their space, and what do they do with it? What spaces do they share, and how does the way they share spaces affect the ways others use these spaces?

If you are teaching in a school where the students are all from the same economic background and sub-culture of society, you can study their environment to look for things they could analyze that would help them see that they could control their environment in some way: litter control, planting,—granted, this is surface work, but it is getting them involved and helping them discover, as many have not, that the environment can be changed, *and by them*, and that this change affects their experience. If your students come from mixed neighborhoods, you will have to search for environmental problems they all share to work on at first, such as public areas, school halls, grounds, classrooms, or park areas.

If your school district sees the school as an instrument for social change rather than maintaining the status quo, then you as a teacher can help slum children learn why their neighborhoods are as they are, but also give them the tools for self-help in modifying their environment, so they have some avenues for constructive change. Unfortunately, teachers are too often expected to fit the children to the society itself.

3: Studying Networks.

Students can study the networks we create between spaces. They can study the networks they use between rooms in a school; the routes they use to get to the office, the playground, and cafeteria. In the newer open space schools, the children make their own networks between the things they want to do. Children can study their neighborhood and the routes they use coming and going to school. This can lead to the patterns of transportation that help them learn how well the city works as a system for getting from one place to another. They can study how these networks and the traffic using them all get along together: people walking or riding in cars, buses, and trucks.

Here we, as art teachers, must help them reflect on how these networks affect the experiences they have, how they affect the lives of people who live along the networks, and how some networks are so designed that they make an area an exciting place, others quiet places, others monotonous and drab. Or the network makes only a confusing place, or as is true of some well landscaped, well marked, well divided

freeways, an open pleasant place at eighty miles an hour. One of our stereotypes seems to be that we consider the quality of specific places and things and not the effect of the spaces between things or the experience we have going around, in, through, and between things. The networks of a city are perhaps ignored because they are not considered things to evaluate.

Older students can look for examples, make comparisons, evaluate and study what alternatives might make a better solution to the use of the environment. Others can study the uses people make of a place, to better understand how it can be designed. Then the work of the two groups' decisions can be compared to see how their findings influence each group.

Nature in the City

The relationships between the man-made and the natural environment can also be studied. The natural environment continues in some way even though filled with man-made things. The form of the land changes the form of a city. Rivers and bluffs divide it; lakes and shorelines outline it. Hills allow light to come into crowded areas, and let people see farther. Such elements of the natural environment tell people where they are.

Students can study the form of their town or city to see how the natural landscape gives it form. They can look at the different ways man works with or against nature. Does he build so the best qualities of nature are saved and used? Trees, for example, can be used to divide people in cars from people walking, to provide shade and softness against the hardness of buildings and glaring reflected light. But some merchants put trees in pots outside their stores only to symbolize that they are doing the latest thing in beautification — without concern for the ways trees change the use of space. Others plant trees to symbolize a more leisurely place for shoppers to stroll by. Children can study ways people are using trees in a city. Hopefully this understanding would lead to respect for selective use of growing things in a city and would give students a tool for modifying the environment themselves. They can look at trees and shrubs to see how well they divide or enhance space in relationship to how the space is used.

Students need to understand that the natural environment is still present in a city, though modified by the city. Pavement intensifies heat; smog is an interaction of man-made gases and weather conditions; heated buildings modify outside temperatures and redirect wind patterns. Respect for rivers, seeing their banks as natural park areas and their water as contributors to the quality of the environment, may be increased if rivers are seen, not as intrusions on a city, but

part of it.

A final area of study deals with design for process—not design for final solutions. A classroom that is used for different kinds of activities throughout a day is a good place to study process and change. Often such rooms are either starkly impersonal or cluttered and disorganized with everyone's storage.

Students can study ways to allow for all the activities, all the storage, and all the display so one class's use of the room won't interfere with another class's choices and work. Before long they will find they have to understand the different uses, the kinds of spaces needed, and the physical properties that can be developed in each time span. Finally, they will probably find they need to devise a better working social pattern so all the parts will work together for the most good for all the students and teachers who use the room. After this experience, students can study places in the city used at different times of day and seasons, that need the use, form, and social organization modified to make the area work better for everyone individually and in groups. Through these processes, students are learning to relate qualitative judgments to social, physical needs—art won't seem so separate from life and life from art.

Constructs for Learning

The development of curriculum in these areas requires that we identify constructs which children or adolescents can use as a basis for looking at the many things that influence the ways a city looks and works and how these interact upon each other. This requires *organismic transactional* learning. The meaning of any single element in the city cannot be learned in isolation but needs to be understood as it functions in relation to the function of other things; as the function of each part transacts with the functions of other things. The teacher's task is to select modules of interactions that children can use. In two-dimensional design they can explore how changing a form, size, shape, or a color affects how it looks with other forms. Then they can see how it is changed by being more distant from us; how the light reflects off it. They can explore the kinds of emotional feelings they get from different combinations of form, line, color, light, etc., and how all these transact with each other in giving us a whole experience.

Understanding the ways we make *order out of confusion* or create variety in monotony, can give young people tools for environmental problem solving. The perceptual processes of relating things that are alike: sizes, shapes, forms, and colors, are used by the designer to make the environment more easily read. Complete repetition of form, line, texture, size, color, etc., is



Photo by Don Byrum

usually monotonous, but by controlling even one of these elements through repetition, order is begun. Order is not an absolute but a relative quality which can be modified by adjusting one of many of the visual elements.

If one begins with two-dimensional problem solving in design, it needs to be carried to three-dimensional problems and the ways the spaces created would affect how they are used. Then such learning could be applied to studying the city. Or one might start with a real space problem and end up seeing how changing form, space, light, or color might change it.

This study of design fits into the same pattern of organismic learning. When one thing in a whole is changed, every other part in that whole must be reevaluated to understand how the whole has been changed. It is this kind of transactional problem solving that is so necessary for living in today's world. The study of the city brings the art of design into direct relationship with the study of man as a social being and with the natural environment. There are different ways of dividing the key elements of a city. Doxiadis divides them into (1) the natural environment (2) humanity as it is evolving, (3) the social organizations men have developed to interact with each other, (4) structures, and (5) networks of transportation, power, water, and communication.² None of these can be removed and still have a city. It is the way these factors interact that gives qualitative aspects to the city. In Doxiades' later work, based on his interdisciplinary conferences on man and his environment, he identifies four critical areas: man, happiness, safety, city.³ Our task as teachers is to find interacting clusters of things that students can learn to evaluate in terms of the ways the parts interact with each other.

Educational Problems

A crucial educational problem in bringing art into the study of environment is the lack of perceptual awareness that students bring to the problem solving task. Bruner and his colleagues' cross-cultural studies of perceptual versus conceptual problem solving indicate that children in schools derived from Western civilization use concepts far more than percepts.⁴ What they know and how they have learned to manipulate information conceptually influence the ways they respond to visual information far more than the ways things actually appear.

Studies by Maccoby and Modiano, comparing urban and rural American children with rural and urban Mexican children find some similar results in grouping *pictures of objects*.⁵ In the first case, they find six-year-old American and Mexican children are

similar in their use of *perceptual qualities*. As they grow older, the *Mexican child increases his sensitivity to perceptual subtleties* of color and form; the American middle class urban child is becoming more abstract in his thinking processes. For example, he will group pictures of things by ways they function together or by finding a large category which contains them all, such as all the things that can be eaten. When rural and urban Mexican children are compared at ages 8 to 10 and 12 to 13, other differences also occur.

By age 12 rural Mexican children are sensitive to the differences between things on perceptual characteristics and their extrinsic functions—what one can do to things. Urban Mexican children change most strongly, more toward being more abstract, using names of things for grouping. They are highly functional, concerned with what things can do. They are also more sensitive to likenesses than differences.

The art teacher may be the only one who is focusing on perceptual material. But unless we are aware of the ways children are taught by our culture to emphasize the conceptual at the expense of the perceptual, we may not be helping them respond to the visual. It may well be this same visual underdevelopment that allows our people to ignore the environment until it gets so bad they are forced to look at it.

Now I would like to share with you some of our experiences in getting teenagers involved with adults in studying the quality of their communities. In our work with teenagers in towns in Oregon, we have found them easy to get involved, if they are only asked. Our graduate students spent a weekend with a teenage group and helped them analyze their own use of the town's spaces and networks. The teenagers had some idea of where teenagers went, as regulations restricted what they could do and where they could go, but they had not made a study of their own actual uses of space as such. The teenagers gave their findings to a group of officials and citizens who also were not aware of the teenagers' lack of meaningful space. The citizens knew the teenagers "ran the gut", that is drove up and down Main Street from the root beer place to the state park and back. But youth couldn't stay longer than to eat at the drive-in, and police kept them out of the park except to turn around. In other words, they had to buy time to park at the A & W by purchasing food, and they could only use their cars in the park if they kept them moving. What the city officials learned was that driving up and down Main Street wasn't so much a choice of teenagers; there just was no place else to go. Their concerns and their continued involvement in plan-

ning places for themselves are now included in the town's concerns.

In other towns, teenagers have made surveys. One group identified out-of-town landlords and made the information public. They volunteered the painting of handsome but old buildings. This has spurred others to do so also. They have worked with one of our graduate architect assistants to design a varied but unifying color plan for the downtown. Young people can certainly study how their town or neighborhood looks by analyzing it with cameras and discussing the ways it is used, the symbols of value found, and the way it looks.

We are working towards curriculum materials for townspeople and high schools to use so they can work together to analyze what is in their town, how the town is used, what is of historical value, what population and traffic changes are to be expected, and how all this relates to making better decisions about the quality and function of their towns. We are finding that by getting students involved in studying space, networks, social uses of the environment, and the man-made and natural environment as they change in time, they are beginning to see conflicts between the needs of people in the environment and the values that have interfered with improving the environment. They are becoming more expert in relating the visual quality to the visual message and to the social use, and to see how these factors need to be considered in economic and political decisions. Hopefully they will be in a better position to design within the constraints of a shrinking world and shrinking basic resources.

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